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S E R M O N
ON THE
L I T U R G Y
OF THE
CHURCH of ENGLAND.

Preached at the Church of ST. MARY LE BOW,
On St. Mark's Day, 1763,

In Purfuance of the last Will of Mr. JOHN HUTCHINS,
Citizen of London.

By JOHN BUTLER, L. L. D. K
Prebendary of WINCHESTER,
And Chaplain to Her ROYAL HIGHNESS the
PRINCESS DOWAGER of WALES.

Published at the Request of the Trustees.

L O N D O N:
Printed for J. and R. T O N S O N in the Strand.

M D C C L X I I I.

SEYMOUR
LITURGY
OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND



Presented at the Council of the British Museum
On Sept. 1763
In Pursuance of the Statute in that behalf made
By the said Statute of the 22d. of Henry the 8th.

By JOHN BUTLER, D.D.
Bishop of Winchester,
and Chaplain to Her Majesty Queen Anne the
PRINCESS DOWAGER of WALES.

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MDCCLXIII.

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Pfalm xxix. 2.

*Give unto the Lord the Glory due unto his Name;
worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness.*

THE Worship of God is so natural a Duty, that the Practice of it has extended as far in the World, as the Knowledge of him; and it has been more or less perfect, in Proportion to the Degrees of Men's Knowledge of God and his Attributes. This is the obvious Account of the various Modes of Worship practised by different Nations; but besides this, some Diversity would naturally arise in each Nation, from the different Understandings of Men, as well as from their opposite Humours and Passions; and Considerations of a foreign Nature would of course intermix in a Matter, in which all Men are concerned, and which good Men have so much at Heart.

One Nation having been selected by God, to keep up the Knowledge of him in the World, and to produce in time the great Revealer of the Divine Will to all Mankind, it appears to have been the particular Object of Providence, that their Worship should be uniform, and that it should serve the important Purpose of keeping them unpolluted by the Idolatries of their Neighbours. Accordingly many Circumstances of the Jewish Worship had a Tendency, so to fix their Attention, that the gross Errors and Practices of their Neighbours might not divert it; whilst many other Circumstances were evidently intended to signify those humble and grateful Sentiments, which possess a pious Mind in the Presence of God.

When the Fulness of Time was come, to realise all that was typified, and to accomplish what was foretold, in the Jewish Church, the Terms of Acceptance with God were proportioned to the extensive Design of the Gospel.

The Jewish Worship, of which the Beauty chiefly consisted in its Conformity to the divine Institution of
it,

it, was of itself superseded by a Religion, designed not for one Nation, but for all the Ends of the Earth. So much of it, as had a Reference to the Idolatries of Nations contiguous to Palestine, was too Local for an Universal Religion ; and so much as had been graciously adapted, by the divine Institutor, to the inveterate Prejudices of the Jews, or to other Circumstances peculiar to their Condition, became useless in a Religion, which was meant to open the Door of Mercy to Gentiles as well as Jews.

But after all these Deductions, it would be absurd to suppose, that a public Worship was not intended under the Gospel, though our Saviour appears by his Silence to have left the Forms of it to be settled, according to the different Exigencies of the several Branches of his Church.

He himself conformed to the Jewish Worship, and frequented the Synagogues and the Temple at Jerusalem. But, as He foresaw the Destruction of that Temple, and the Overthrow of the Jewish State, it may be presumed, that he would have signified his Will to his Disciples, had he meant to have

have the typical Parts of the Jewish Service retained, after they were accomplished in his Person, or had he meant to have any particular Forms and Ceremonies substituted in their room, for the Use of all Ages.

But he did not leave his Church without the most Essential Directions. His Institution of those two significant Rites, which we call Sacraments, and the general Form of Prayer he prescribed, sufficiently intimated his Will, that divine Worship should be an indispensable Part of Christian Duty ; and they were at the same Time strong Intimations of the SIMPLICITY, which, according to the Genius of his Religion, was to be the principal Ingredient in the Christian Beauty of Holiness.

That his Prayer was a Model for Christian Prayer in general, not a Form intended to exclude all other Forms of Prayer, is so evident from his own Conduct, as well as from some Apostolical Directions, that it seems to require no other Proof. But whether any other set Form was used in the early Infancy of his Church, is not so perfectly clear.

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We know, that the Worship in the Jewish Synagogue consisted, especially after their Return from Babylon, partly of Forms of Prayer. It seems very probable, that the Apostles would retain such, as were not inconsistent with the Purity of the Gospel ; or at least, that they would continue the Use of public Forms of Prayer, as no less proper in the Christian, than in the Jewish Church.

But how far they carried the Practice, is not an Inquiry necessary to justify the present Establishment of it ; since it derogates neither from the Utility, nor the Authority of public Forms, to suppose the Apostles and their immediate Successors to have been inspired, when they delivered themselves either in Prayer or Exhortation ; and to suppose the People, at least the truly pious Part of them, to have had extraordinary Assistances from Heaven, in joining devoutly in a Prayer, with which they were before unacquainted. Their Example being a Rule to us, in those Instances only, in which it is imitable, could not be an invariable Rule in this Instance, after their Powers were withdrawn, and
when

when the whole was left to the ordinary Powers of human Understanding.

At whatever Period this happened, Christians must soon have perceived, how insufficient, for the Ends of publick Prayer, extemporary Effusions were, and how much the proper Devotion of Mind was diminished, by the Attention necessary, to apprehend the Meaning of him, who was the Leader in Prayer, to collect the Force of his Words, and to follow him to the End of his Period, where sometimes the principal Word lies, which determines the Sense of the rest.

This Inconvenience must necessarily have arisen from the public uninspired Use of Extemporary, or, as some call it, Free Prayer; and if the Minister chanced, as might happen in any Century after the first, to want Piety, or Judgment, or the People to need something to fix their Attention, and excite their Devotion, the Inconvenience then became a considerable Evil.

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To remove and prevent it, Liturgies were drawn up in different Forms, by the Governors of different Churches, till the Church of Rome gave Law to the whole Christian World, and prescribed One Set of Forms for all Nations. What sort of Forms they were, how unintelligible to great Part of the Christian World, how foreign to the Simplicity of the Gospel, what a Number of Mediators they erected, instead of the only Mediator between God and Man, and how they made the Commandment of Christ of none effect, by a variety of human Traditions, is sufficiently known amongst us.

When the Corruptions of the Romish Church were arrived at their Crisis, and Providence raised up the Great Men, who resisted the unchristian Laws of an unchristian Tyrant, it was the Happiness of our national Church to be furnished with Pious and Judicious Men, who compiled a Liturgy, with an apparent Desire to unite all Protestants, of this Nation at least, in one intelligible Form of Worship.

But it happened unfortunately, that the Protestant Church abroad was early divided, and the Division

was imported hither, by some of the great Men, who had been obliged to fly from a persecuting Reign, in which our Protestantism narrowly escaped Destruction in its Infancy.

The History of this Division is not easily related with a strict Impartiality ; and so far as it leads to reproach either Side, it is better not revived. But without minutely repeating former Grievances, we may and ought to regret, that Things Indifferent were ever treated as if they had been Essential ; that the Establishment of indifferent Things was not considered as a Reason for acquiescing in them ; and that the Breach of Christian Charity, which seldom fails to attend a Separation more or less, did not deter Men from separating, without extreme Necessity.

However a Separation took Place, and was partly founded in Objections to the established Liturgy. That it is not a perfect Composition, may be confessed, without Disrespect to it. If it be more perfect, than any Form of Worship used by the Persons or Parties, who censure it, then it is sufficiently

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ficiently defended against Them ; and if it answer all the valuable Ends of public Worship, our Governors in Church and State are not chargeable with a Neglect of the Cause of Religion, in delaying a Reformation of the Liturgy, till a proper Season, of which they must be the Judges. We have Reason, in the mean Time, to thank God for our Book of Common Prayer, upon comparing it with that, for which it was exchanged. A farther Reformation might comprehend more Protestants ; and it might be the Means of losing many of the present Members of our Church. A wise Government will consider well, in so serious a Matter, before it makes the hazardous Experiment, whether the Benefit would outweigh the Loss ?

But it is our Comfort, that the Imperfections are neither so many, nor so great, as to exclude the Beauty of Holiness, which, under the Gospel, may be said to consist in a Worship, RATIONAL and DECENT with Respect to the Form, and SINCERE in the act. And what is there in our Liturgy that is irrational and indecent, or that is inconsistent with a sincere Worship of God ?

Is it Irrational to confess our Sins; to implore the divine Pardon; to pray for Graces of which we feel the want, and which God has promised upon our Prayer to supply; to intercede for all Men; and to give humble and hearty Thanks to our heavenly Father? Indeed it is not pretended by Christians of any Denomination, that these several Acts of Worship interfere with the truest Notions we have of God and of our relation to him.

Is it then the Form, in which these Prayers and Thanksgivings are prescribed in our Liturgy, that contradicts any Principles of right Reason? No one will assert this, who has exercised his intellectual Faculties in Acts of Piety. He will find the Words in general corresponding to his own Desires; he will feel the Benefit of expressing different Desires in distinct Prayers, of keeping Devotion erect and attentive by a judicious Variety, and of intermixing Parts of Scripture and Ejaculations, worthy of the most rational Mind, with the Prayers, which express the purest Devotion of the Heart. All this is so necessary an Aid to the greatest Understanding, when directed to God, that it is highly probable,
the

the most perfect Reasoner would, with the Scriptures before him, contrive a Form of Prayer very similar to this, if it had never existed.

For here is nothing superstitious, unless the belief of God and Jesus Christ be Superstition. Here is no Prayer for a Blessing, which we do not really need, nor any acknowledgement of a Mercy, which we have not really received. The Language is not below the Sentiments of a rational Being in the Act of Prayer, nor is it strained beyond the natural extent of the Thoughts of such a Being, addressing his Creator. Enthusiasts complain, that it is cold and lifeless, whilst Men in the other Extreme represent it as having a tendency to Enthusiasm. It should seem from these opposite Complaints, that a due Medium had been observed between the two Extremes. Some Parts are animated, and the Constitution of Man requires, that they should be so. If it were absolute Enthusiasm to lift up the Heart of Man to God, it would follow, that the Perfection of a reasonable Being consisted in his Distance from God; the contrary of which is true. But both the Charges are obviated by a Trial of these Forms of Prayer.

Prayer. They will not appear dull to a well-disposed Mind, and they will not appear Enthusiastical to such a Mind, when it experiences, that the Affections here raised are founded in some great Truth, and tend to the Practice of some great Duty.

In the next place, is there any thing Indecent in the Form of Worship prescribed in our Liturgy? Will the candid Papist deny, that it suits the Condition of Man with respect to God, and that it is adapted to the Condition of whole Congregations united in the Act of Worship? Will a candid Fellow Protestant affirm, that any Part of it tends to Idolatry, as some Parts of the Romish Worship do? Candid Men of all Persuasions will confess the Truth, and therefore the Substance of our Liturgy has nothing to fear from their Examination. Superfluities and Irreverence are both apt to shelter themselves under the word *Decency*; but both are as carefully avoided, as the Times would permit, when this Form was compiled; and are not complained of now, by the most devout Worshippers in our Church.

When

When Man presents himself before God in private, his Sense of God, and of his own Dependence and Obligations, together with his Offences, will impress his Mind with a reverential Awe, which, like other Sentiments of the Mind, will almost involuntarily be accompanied with a suitable Posture of Body. When whole Congregations present themselves, the same Reasons subsisting, or being supposed to subsist, the same Posture is properly prescribed to them, for the Benefit of each individual, as well as for the mutual Benefit of Example. These Reasons for prescribing the outward Act, which is most expressive of the supposed State of the Mind, are supported by the highest Authorities; kneeling having been the Posture of Prayer in the Jewish, and in the earliest Days of the Christian Church.

To keep the Prayers true to their proper Object, the Fopperies of Rome are discarded from our Church, and her Ministers assume no such authoritative Powers to themselves, as might divert the Devotion of the People from its proper Object to them. The Objections, which have been made to the Posture of kneeling at the Sacrament, cannot

cannot justly be made now, when there is hardly a Member of our Church, who believes the Elements to be Objects of Worship, or who believes them to be any thing more in themselves, than they were before Consecration.

The same regard to Decency runs through the Form of our Prayers. God is addressed in Words becoming our Conceptions of his Greatness, and the Knowledge we have, or ought to have, of our Dependence and Unworthiness. The Form of Confession is as humble, as becomes self-convicted Sinners, who apply to their Judge for Mercy. The Prayers for Temporal Blessings are few and general, and very consistent with an intire Submission to the Will and Providence of God. The Prayers for Spiritual blessings are many and various; as short as our Saviour directs our Prayers to be, and as numerous, as the Wants, of which we ought to be sensible, and for the Relief of which we are commanded to pray. The Appeal to the Merits and Mediation of Christ, which concludes every Prayer, implies an humble and decent Confession, that we cannot trust for Success to our own Merits.

If

If then the Prayers themselves, the Disposition of them, and the Manner in which they are directed to be offered up, concur to form a Worship becoming such a Creature as Man, towards his Creator, Governor and Judge, surely we do not exaggerate in the praise of our Liturgy, when we attribute to it the Merit of conducing to a Decent Worship.

In the last Place, is the Book of common Prayer suited to a sincere Worship? Is there any Thing in the Prayers, which doth not correspond to the Purity of Heart of the best Christian, and which he may not pronounce as Words, flowing from his own Sentiments? Are not the Blessings he prays for, the very Blessings he wishes and needs? Is he not in the Sight of God that miserable Sinner, which he professes himself to be? Has he not received the Mercies, for which he is here returning Thanks? What is there then, in which a sincere Worshipper of God may not join, or which does not come up to the devout Thoughts of his own Mind in the Worship of God? These Questions may be asked the more confidently, because there are few of our dissenting

Fellow-Protestants, who do not sometimes join in these Forms. If they cannot offer up such Prayers sincerely, they would not join in them at all; for we have no more right to charge them, than they have to charge us, with honouring God with the Lips, when the Heart is far from him.

If then our Liturgy be, upon the whole, a proper Form of Worship for a rational and sinful Creature to offer to the great and perfect God: and if it be expressive of all the sincerity of Devotion, to which the best Christian can pretend, let us not be moved, by here and there an Imperfection, to think lightly of so great an Instrument of true Piety, which has assisted many, and will, even whilst it continues unreformed, assist many more good Christians in their way to Heaven.

It is in other Cases much easier to censure a great Work, than to execute it; and it may be truly said of a Form of publick Prayer, that it is one of the most difficult human Compositions. A knowledge of Scripture and of Christian Antiquity are indeed considerable

rable Requisites; but the most fundamental are, a large Measure of true Piety and a very superior Judgment. Without both these Qualifications, the Prayer produced will be very lifeless; it will betray the Incapacity of the Composer, and it will neither excite, nor assist Devotion in the Reader.

Scripture indeed is an inexhaustible Fund for the Language of Prayer; but Scripture in the Hands of a Man without real Piety will be as insufficient to produce a good Prayer, as the best Instrument will be in unskilful Hands, to produce a Work of Art. If the pious Desire, to which the scriptural Phrase should correspond, exists not in the Heart of the Composer, Scripture will be applied by him indiscriminately; and if at the same time he be deficient in Judgment, he will make use of scriptural Phrases, which are not adapted to the Language of Prayer; and his own Expressions will be at a distance from the proper medium, either too lofty, or too low; either too general, or too particular, the latter of which an injudicious Man will be more apt to fall into, than the former.

The Compilers of our Liturgy labored under none of this Incapacity. They are remarkably happy in the Use of Scripture Language, and surprizingly judicious in compiling a Form of Prayers, which, at so great a Distance of Time, and under some change of Language and Manners, still suits the Condition of all the Christians, who use it, and enables them to present themselves before God acceptably, on every Occasion of Public, and on many Occasions of private Worship.

I cannot better recapitulate and inforce what hath been said, than in the Words of a Prelate, who was, throughout his long Life, an illustrious Ornament to this Protestant Church, and argued most unanswerably for the *reasonableness of Conformity* to it; I mean the late excellent Bishop HOADLEY, in whose *persuasive to lay-Conformity* we find the following Passage on the Liturgy;

“ There is nothing in this Service indecent ; no-
 “ thing unsuitable to the Majesty of him who re-
 “ ceives it, or unbecoming the Character of those
 who

“ who offer it. It is composed of Confessions; of
 “ Praises and Thanksgivings; of Prayers and Inter-
 “ cessions; and these very well adapted to the Con-
 “ ditions and Obligations, and Necessities of the Ge-
 “ nerality of Christians. And what could you wish
 “ for more in a *Public Service*? Or, where can
 “ you go, where you can be certain of so good and
 “ so proper Assistances? If you say, you have been
 “ present at this Service, and find little entertain-
 “ ment in it; that it is dry and jejune, unapt to
 “ move your Affections, and raise your Devotions;
 “ consider, whence this must have proceeded? Have
 “ you come to it with a hearty good Will, and a
 “ sincere desire of relishing it? Have you thrown
 “ out of your Minds all Prejudices, and endeavoured
 “ to cure all that Indifference to it, which a long
 “ disuse may have caused? Have you attended to
 “ it with Application and Seriousness? And, above
 “ all, have you prepared your Hearts before-hand,
 “ and endeavoured to furnish them with such
 “ Thoughts, and such Affections, as are proper to
 “ be expressed in all the several Parts of *Public*
 “ *Worship*? This is the main Point of all: And
 “ whoever

“ whoever hath conscientiously done this, I am per-
 “ suaded, will not lightly speak evil of the *established*
 “ *Liturgy.*”

F I N I S.